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U.S. Should Always Keep Eye on Cuba

By W. D. Workman

At least one Congressman, among those convening today in Washington, is fed up with American hands-off policy toward Cuba, and is willing to invade the island if necessary.

Rep. L. Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.), a ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, hopes that Congress will put pressure on the executive branch to take a firm stand against the Communist threat posed by Fidel Castro.

Rep. Rivers is especially fired up at the moment because of the Indian invasion of the Portuguese enclave of Goa. He says that if the United Nations can justify that action, then the U.N. should be jubilant over a United States seizure of Cuba.

It may be questioned whether he actually wants this country to take over Cuba lock-stock-and-barrel. But there is no doubting his hope that we do whatever is needed to safeguard the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo, the rights of Americans in Cuba, and the national defense of the United States itself.

Whatever happens to the Rivers proposal, it at least should clear away some of the fog surrounding the United States policy toward Cuba. Theiasco of last spring, which never has been satisfactorily explained to the American people, left these offshore international waters muddier than ever. And recurring reports of other expeditions being readied for anti-Castro operations in Cuba are compounding the confusion.

For one thing, why has no one invoked the federal statute which forbids use of American soil as a pre-invasion staging area? Section 900 of Title 18 says, in positive language:

"Whoever, within the United States, knowingly begins or sets on foot or provides or prepares a means for or furnishes the money for, or takes part in, any military or naval expedition or enterprise to be carried on from thence against the territory or dominion of any foreign prince or state, or of any colony, district,

or people with whom the United States is at peace, shall be fined not more than \$3,000 or imprisoned not more than three years, or both."

For another thing, should this law apply to agencies of the federal government itself, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, which has been credited with cooking up much of the anti-Castro activity?

Such laws have been in the federal statutes since the days of George Washington. They were invoked time and again during the mid-19th century, when American sentiment, especially in the South, favored the liberation of Cuba from Spanish rule.

During that period, three American presidents in succession — Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, and Franklin Pierce — all found it necessary to issue proclamations warning against participation in military expeditions for Cuban liberation.

The proclamations were not effective in all cases, for that persuasive Venezuelan adventurer, Marciso Lopez, managed not only to raise expeditions in the United States, but to launch them. Twice he led "liberation" forces ashore on Cuba. The first attempt failed, and the invaders withdrew back to the United States. The second effort (a year later, in 1851) brought even worse luck, for Lopez and a number of his followers, mostly Southerners, were captured by the Spaniards and executed.

Almost a half-century later, the United States itself got involved in the liberation of Cuba, and put the island on the road to independence. Today, the Pearl of the Antilles seems at the end of that road, and once more Americans are concerned over the situation.

This concern should properly be aired in the Congress. The opportunity may be presented by a latter-day South Carolinian who might well quote an illustrious predecessor from his state. John C. Calhoun once said of Cuba in correspondence with Andrew Jackson:

"No American statesman ought